Functional Skills



VQA Functional Skills Qualification in English at Entry Level

Speaking, Listening, and Communicating (SLC) Component Handbook

Version 1.1

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Summary of changes

The following table provides a summary of the changes that have been made to the qualification specification since the publication of the previous version.

Version number	Summary of changes
V1.1	Assessment Preparation Check and Role of the Tutor in Administering the SLC Assessment sections updated.

Introduction

This document is intended to support centre staff in delivering the Speaking, Listening, and Communicating (SLC) internally-set, controlled assessment component. It aims to provide essential information and direct centre staff to additional resources that may be useful. Centre staff are encouraged to review this handbook thoroughly as they prepare for the SLC assessment delivery for the following qualifications:

- VQA Functional Skills Qualification in English at Entry Level 1 (RQF) (610/6263/7)
- VQA Functional Skills Qualification in English at Entry Level 2 (RQF) (610/6264/9)
- VQA Functional Skills Qualification in English at Entry Level 3 (RQF) (610/6265/0).

In addition to reading this handbook, it is essential staff are familiar with the following VQA policies and guidance documentation:

- *Functional Skills Qualifications at Entry Level: Regulations for the Conduct of the Controlled Assessment*
- *Functional Skills Qualifications at Entry Level: Quality Assurance and Standardisation Guide*
- *Functional Skills Qualifications in English at Entry Level: SLC Remote Delivery Guide*
- *Appeals Policy*
- *Complaints Policy*
- *Conflict of Interest Policy*
- *Equality and Diversity Policy*
- *GDPR and Privacy Policy*
- *Malpractice and Maladministration Policy*
- *Reasonable Adjustments and Special Considerations Policy.*

VQA policy documents can be accessed on **our website.**

The Functional Skills Qualifications at Entry Level SLC assessment is a key component of the Functional Skills Qualifications in English at Entry Levels 1, 2, and 3 and focuses on developing practical communication skills that are essential for everyday interactions. The SLC assessment component is largely defined by Ofqual guidance.

VQA has adopted a flexible approach to the internally-set controlled assessment for the SLC, allowing centre staff to choose between delivery methods 1 and 2, as detailed in the table below.

Assessment Component	Option 1	Option 2
Internally-set, controlled assessment: Speaking, Listening, and Communicating (SLC)	Use adapt or customise exemplar assessment materials provided by VQA	Use of centre-devised assessments (CDAs)

Depending on learner demand, centre staff can use a combination of options 1 and 2, however centres must submit all live SLC assessments that have been adapted or customised or centre-devised to VQA for quality assurance at least **four weeks** before any assessment takes place.

All SLC exemplar assessment materials will be available to access and download from the secure area of VQA's Verve management suite.

The SLC assessment component must be delivered and assessed by an individual of suitable competence. For detailed guidance on the recommended qualifications and experience staff should hold, refer to the VQA Functional Skills Qualifications in English at Entry Level Qualification Specification. The tutor must be added to the centre's VQA profile on Verve Management Suite and must be approved to undertake the role.

Centre staff should be aware that VQA require **all** SLC assessments to be recorded via a video and audio method. If the tutor determines that an audio-only recording is the most appropriate method to ensure safeguarding, accessibility and inclusivity, then the SLC assessment must be conducted face-to-face at the centre, and centre staff must apply for a Reasonable Adjustment prior to the assessment.

Preparing Centre-Devised Assessments

The SLC assessment is an internally-set, controlled, and performance-based assessment designed and administered by centre staff. It is both internally and externally quality assured.

When devising the SLC assessments centre staff must ensure that they follow the mandatory format specified in the table below.

Table 1

Level	Assessment tasks	Type of Assessment	Timing of Assessment	Total assessment time	Tutor/Learner Interaction
Entry Level 1	Task 1: part A	One-to-one activity	2 minutes	10 minutes	One-to-one tutor interaction.
	Task 1: part B		3 minutes		
	Task 2	One-to-one discussion	5 minutes		
Entry Level 2	Task 1	One-to-one activity	7 minutes	15 minutes	One-to-one tutor interaction. The group discussion for Task 2 should have between three and five participants taking part. * When 1 learner is to be assessed, the group can include the tutor and 1 other participant.
	Task 2	Group discussion	8 minutes		
Entry Level 3	Task 1	One-to-one activity	10 minutes	20 minutes	One-to-one tutor interaction. The group discussion for Task 2 should have between three and five participants taking part. * When 1 learner is to be assessed, the group can include the tutor and 1 other participant.
	Task 2	Group discussion	10 minutes		

* The other participant could be a peer, familiar adult/member of centre staff or an individual of a similar level that can step in to fulfil the role of the other participant.

Where VQA permits audio-only recorded SLC assessments, we advise that groups should not include learners completing the SLC assessment at the same time.

There should be a break of no more than 10 minutes after Task 1.

When creating CDAs, centre staff must refer to the exemplar assessment materials as a guide to clarify expectations and the level of demand, and must ensure the below requirements are met when devising tasks:

- tasks are suitable for their chosen method of assessment delivery (remote/face-to-face).
- include topics/themes that relate to everyday communication and within the learner's life experience.
- tasks represent a diverse society without reinforcing stereotypes or engaging in discriminatory practices.
- tasks align with the scope of study and enable learners to meet the required expectations
- offer a balance between consistency, effectiveness and an appropriate level of challenge without over-assessing.
- the scope of study content is allocated for each task as specified in the scope of study allocation tables.
- where learners have the opportunity to demonstrate each scope of study, this is clearly indicated within their CDA.
- Entry Level 1 includes simple narratives, information and instructions, and short statements, explanations, discussions, questions and exchanges.
- Entry Level 2 includes short narratives and explanations and instructions, discussions and straightforward information and instructions.
- Entry Level 3 includes straightforward narratives, accounts, explanations, discussions instructions, information and descriptions.
- tasks do not rely on written language or require the communication partner to read, as reading and writing skills are covered under separate requirements.
- it is specified how the scenario will be shared. Tutors can share the scenario in any way that is appropriate to their learners, for example:
  - presentation by tutor
  - verbal short talk by tutor
  - audio recording that will allow learners to apply the scope of study to informal and some formal contexts, in familiar situations.
- tutor facilitation and the prompts and questioning that may be provided are identified
- resources, for example, props and visual stimuli, are identified.

Centre staff should refer to the '*Glossary for use with subject content*' in the ***Functional Skills English Conditions and Requirements (publishing.service.gov.uk)*** for explanations of terms and phrases used in the scope of study.

Centre staff are permitted to design CDA tasks that include role-play or practical activities, where appropriate and accessible for the learner. Centres must ensure that all tasks fully meet VQA's requirements and expectations.

CDAs must be submitted to VQA for quality assurance at least **four weeks** prior to any assessment taking place. The assessment will be reviewed against the subject content statements and requirements for the relevant SLC level and VQA will inform the centre of the outcome. To submit a CDA for approval, centres should use **this form**.

If a centre chooses to use the VQA Exemplar Assessment Materials (1-4) without adaptation or customisation these do not need to be submitted to VQA to be approved before use.

Once the CDAs have been approved, centres are free to use them over the lifetime of the qualification, provided the:

- scope of study remains the same
- materials continue to be fit for purpose and meet learner and delivery needs.

It is the centre's responsibility to stay updated with any changes to Functional Skills and review their assessment materials accordingly.

VQA will ensure that centres are informed of any updates to qualification content or changes to the assessment or administration of the Functional Skills at Entry Level Qualifications. It is the centre's responsibility to review and act upon these communications to ensure that all aspects of delivery, particularly relating to the SLC components, remain valid and consistent with qualification requirements.
Centres must establish a formal review as part of their IQA procedures to ensure any centre-devised assessment aligns with the Scope of Study and assessment expectations. Centres may need to make adjustments to their assessment materials based on EQA feedback and are responsible for documenting any changes made and ensuring that amended centre-devised assessments are submitted to VQA for approval prior to use. This process will be monitored as part of their EQA review and failure to remain up to date with qualification changes may impact a centre's approved status.

Scope of Study Allocation Table: Entry Level 1

		Task 1	Task 2
1	Say the names of the letters of the alphabet	✓	
2	Identify and extract the main information from short statements and explanations		✓
3	Follow single-step instructions, asking for them to be repeated if necessary	✓	
4	Make requests and ask straightforward questions using appropriate terms and registers	✓	✓
5	Respond to questions about specific information		✓
6	Make clear statements about basic information and communicate feelings and opinions on straightforward topics		✓
7	Understand and participate in simple discussions or exchanges with another person about a straightforward topic		✓

Scope of Study Allocation Table: Entry Level 2

		Task 1	Task 2
1	Identify and extract the main information and detail from short explanations	✓	✓
2	Make requests and ask clear questions appropriately in different contexts	✓	✓
3	Respond appropriately to straightforward questions	✓	✓
4	Follow the gist of discussions	✓	✓
5	Clearly express straightforward information and communicate feelings and opinions on a range of straightforward topics		✓
6	Make appropriate contributions to simple group discussions with others about straightforward topics		✓

Scope of Study Allocation Table: Entry Level 3

		Task 1	Task 2
1	Identify and extract relevant information and detail in straightforward explanations	✓	✓
2	Make requests and ask concise questions using appropriate language in different contexts	✓	✓
3	Communicate information and opinions clearly on a range of topics	✓	✓
4	Respond appropriately to questions on a range of straightforward topics	✓	✓
5	Follow and understand the main points of discussions	✓	✓
6	Make relevant contributions to group discussions about straightforward topics		✓
7	Listen to and respond appropriately to other points of view, respecting conventions of turn-taking		✓

Preparing for Assessment Delivery

In advance of the SLC assessment, learners should be given opportunities to practise and become familiar with the requirements of the assessment tasks and understand the expectations of the SLC assessment. For example:

- number of assessment tasks
- type of assessment
- contribution required - For example, engaging in role play, asking and answering questions
- tutor role and limitations
- timings
- number of participants
- location
- recording requirements.

Learners should only be assessed when the tutor is confident that they are ready and fully prepared to undertake the assessment. Before agreeing an assessment date, the tutor should consider the following:

- proficiency in demonstrating the scope of study for the learner's entry level
- confidence in speaking and listening in a controlled environment
- feedback from the tutor on previous practice assessment tasks.

Role of Centre Staff in Preparing for Assessment Delivery

It is recommended that learners are provided with support to help them prepare for the assessment, including suggested strategies for managing nervousness and panic. Additionally, it is recommended that learners being assessed remotely are given the opportunity to practise in a simulated remote environment beforehand.

For learner wellbeing during face-to-face SLC assessments, VQA offers the flexibility of allowing a familiar, non-assessed individual(s) to be present. When organising learners, tutors can group them with familiar peers or adults to help ensure learners feel comfortable during the assessment.

The tutor must provide the learner with an overview of the assessment title, theme, and scenario topic at least 10 days before the assessment date. However, learners should not be given the specific questions or detailed information about the scenario.

The tutor must inform the learner whether the SLC assessment will be conducted in a controlled environment either face-to-face or remotely. For remote assessments, it is crucial to ensure that learners have access to a suitable webcam-enabled device and a stable internet connection. For more information, refer to the VQA Functional Skills in English at Entry Level SLC Remote Delivery Guide.

In both face-to-face and remote assessments, the tutor must ensure that the SLC assessment is conducted in a controlled environment that is quiet, free from distractions, and undisturbed while ensuring safety and privacy. For face-to-face delivery, the environment should also accommodate multiple learners with sufficient space and comfort.

For detailed guidance on ensuring that the controlled environment meets VQA's requirements, please refer to VQA Functional Skills at Entry Level Regulations for the Conduct of the Controlled Assessment.

The tutor should identify any potential difficulties a learner may face in accessing the SLC assessment as early as possible and select appropriate adjustments to ensure accessibility. The centre staff are responsible for ensuring all reasonable adjustments are made and must follow VQA's process for requesting and implementing adjustments. The tutor must ensure that all approved Reasonable Adjustments are applied during both the preparation and delivery of the SLC assessment.

For further details, please refer to the *VQA Reasonable Adjustments and Special Considerations Policy* on our website.

Assessment Preparation Check

Tutors can use the below points as a guide to ensure effective preparation for the SLC assessment.

- staff can carry out their key responsibilities in line with VQA's policies and guidance documentation.
- learners have completed practise tasks and are confident and familiar with the requirements.
- learners demonstrate proficiency in the scope of study relevant to their Entry Level qualification.
- learners display confidence in speaking and listening within a controlled environment.
- learners have acted upon feedback on practice tasks and made any necessary improvements.
- learners know strategies to manage nervousness or panic effectively.

- learners have had the opportunity to practice in a simulated remote environment (if the assessment is being conducted remotely) using practice tasks.
- assessment materials and accommodations are prepared and meet the requirements
- learners are aware of the assessment date and time.
- all recording and video equipment is functional and ready to use.
- any required Reasonable Adjustments to meet the learner's needs have been applied for and prepared.
- all preparation steps have been completed and this has been verified.

Administering the SLC Assessment

Entry Level 1, 2, and 3 learners can be grouped together for assessment activities as specified in **Table 1**.

At Entry Levels 1, 2, and 3, each assessment component can be scheduled on different days, and the order in which the components are taken is determined by the centre. Additional time beyond the specified assessment time is only permitted with an approved reasonable adjustment and this must be recorded on the *Learner Assessment Record (LAR)*.

Please refer to the ***VQA Reasonable Adjustments and Special Considerations Policy*** available on VQA's website for further guidance.

Centre staff should follow the requirements in **Table 1** when administering the SLC assessment.

Sign Language (BSL or SSE) is allowed, provided it is accessible to all participants in the discussion. Other languages cannot be used as substitutes for English. The use of augmentative speech equipment is permitted if it aligns with the learner's usual communication method.

The SLC internally-set, controlled assessment does not require an additional Invigilator. The learner's subject tutor will conduct the assessment, however, to prevent malpractice the tutor should fulfil the responsibilities of the invigilator as outlined in the *VQA Functional Skills at Entry Level Quality Assurance and Standardisation Guide.*

Role of the Tutor in Administering the SLC Assessment

At the start of the assessment, the tutor must inform the learner that the session will be videoed and audio-recorded and specify when the recording will begin unless a reasonable adjustment exempting video recording has been approved by VQA.

The tutor must ensure all learners introduce themselves and remain visible throughout all video recordings. The tutor must ensure that all learner movements are captured on the video recording and if a BSL/SSE interpreter is used during the assessment the interpreter must also be visible.

The tutor must conduct a validity check to confirm the learner's identity. The tutor must ensure the individual taking the SLC assessment matches the ID provided. Examples of acceptable learner identification/authentication are:

- passport

- driving license/EEA Photocard
- student ID card (issued from an educational institution with learner photo)
- national identity card
- residence permit issued by the Home Office
- citizen card
- Post Office PASS card
- MY ID Card
- Proof of Age Standards Scheme (PASS) Card.

Other forms of photo ID may also be accepted but should be agreed in advance with VQA.

For details on validity checks when conducting the SLC assessment remotely, please refer to the VQA Functional Skills in English at Entry Level SLC Remote Delivery Guide.

An assessment environment check must be completed and is to ensure that the environment is suitable for the assessment and free from potential distractions or any unauthorised resources.

The tutor must conduct a visual 360 sweep of the room (no background filters or video call effects are allowed). This check must be video recorded.

The tutor must document the completion of validity and assessment environment checks on the LAR to support internal quality assurance processes. These checks are not counted in the assessment time.

Where the tutor or the learner feels the allocated environment is not conducive to a valid, safe, and fair assessment, the assessment can be cancelled, and rearranged. The decision and reason should be recorded on the LAR.

Once the tutor is satisfied that all required checks have been completed and the specified requirements have been met, they should confirm that the assessment can proceed. If proceeding, the tutor must:

- reiterate that the assessment will be video, and audio-recorded
- confirm the assessment details, such as duration
- remind the learner(s) of the format and any evidence they are allowed to access or use during the assessment
- recap that they can ask for questions to be reworded or clarified if required.

After approval of adapted or customised exemplar assessment materials or CDA's centres must not alter the assessment tasks in a way that changes the meaning or difficulty, as this is essential for ensuring validity, comparability, and reliability.

All learners must receive the appropriate level of support when attempting their SLC assessment. This support includes understanding the task requirements, the content of the task, and the preferred method of delivery.

The tutor must ensure that the language used throughout is appropriate for the learner's level. They should also be mindful that the transition from Entry Level 1 to Entry Level 3 involves a gradual reduction in tutor support and an increase in learner independence, task complexity, and interactive abilities. This progression should be reflected in the instructions, materials, and prompts provided to the learner to align with the requirements of the Scope of Study.

The tutor is responsible for facilitating both tasks. It is important to ensure that the interaction during the assessment is in line with the following requirements:

	Requirements

Entry Level 1:	• Visual aids or cues can be used to support the learner to ensure the learner does not miss any letters. However, the tutor must not say the names of any of the letters to learner.
	• Tutors may prompt the learner during the task if these requirements are not met. Examples of prompting could be:
	  ○ rephrasing the task/instruction/question
	  ○ reminding the learner of the main parts of the question/task being assessed at that stage
	  ○ giving the learner another opportunity to try and answer the question/complete the task.
	• Prompts may be used if necessary, such as providing additional clarification of the instructions or prompting the learner with questions. However, prompts should be minimal and should not directly complete the task for the learner.
	• Providing prompts more than three times for the same Scope of Study criteria should result in the learner not meeting the required standard for that criterion within the task.
	• Tutors can repeat the task instructions as necessary but must make sure the learner has enough time to meet the scope of study criteria for the task.

	Requirements
Entry Level 2:	• Tutors can prompt the learner(s) to ask each other questions and discuss the stimulus. • Tutors may use prompt topics to help scaffold learner(s) in formulating their questions and requests. • Tutors can repeat parts of the text and task instructions as necessary but must make sure the learners have enough time to meet the scope of study criteria for the task. • It is the responsibility of the learner to show they can meet the required scope of study standards. However, the tutor may provide minimal

	prompting to a learner during the task if these standards are not being met. Examples of prompting could be: • rephrasing the question/task • reminding the learner of the main parts of the question/task being assessed at that stage • giving the learner another opportunity to try and answer the question/complete the instruction. • Providing prompts more than two times for the same Scope of Study criteria should result in the learner not meeting the required standard for that criterion within the task. • Ensure appropriate turn-taking, the tutor may participate in the discussion.

	Requirements

Entry Level 3:	• Tutors can prompt the learner(s) to respond appropriately to questions and give opinions.
	• Tutors may use prompt topics to help scaffold learner(s) in formulating their questions and requests.
	• Tutors can repeat parts of the text and task instructions as necessary but must make sure the learner has enough time to meet the scope of study criteria for the task.
	• Providing prompts more than two times for the same Scope of Study criteria should result in the learner not meeting the required standard for that criterion within the task.
	• It is the responsibility of the learner to show they can meet the required scope of study standards. However, the tutor may provide minimal prompting to a learner during the task if these standards are not being met. Examples of prompting could be:
	  ○ rephrasing the question/task
	  ○ reminding the learner of the main parts of the question/task being assessed at that stage
	  ○ giving the learner another opportunity to try and answer the question/complete the instruction.

Issues During the Assessment

The tutor should remain vigilant throughout the assessment to ensure that the environment remains controlled at all times.

If an incident occurs this must be managed appropriately. An incident is defined as anything that interrupts the natural flow of the assessment and causes it to be paused, such as:

- fire alarm tests
- extreme weather (such as heavy rain/hail)
- minor and temporary technical difficulties
- a learner coughing/sneezing fit
- malpractice
- emergencies
- incidents that put the learner(s) or the tutor at risk, such as faulty electrical equipment
- general concerns about the quality of the controlled environment.

In some cases, it may be acceptable to continue the assessment after an interruption. However, in other cases, the assessment may have to be stopped, voided, and rescheduled.

If an incident occurs the tutor must evaluate whether the assessment can continue or should be terminated. Factors to consider include:

- whether the incident provides an opportunity for the learner(s) to gain an unfair advantage
- whether any learner(s) becomes distressed or overly nervous as a result of the incident
- whether the unforeseen event adversely affects the ability of the learner(s) to fully and fairly demonstrate their skills and knowledge.

If an incident results in a situation that is deemed advantageous or detrimental to the learner, the assessment should be terminated.

Examples of incidents where assessments may be able to continue	Examples of incidents where assessments must be voided
Fire alarm tests where the learner does not have to leave the room	Malpractice, such as learner collusion, improper use of materials
Extreme weather (such as heavy rain/hale) that does not impact on audio quality	Emergencies
Minor and temporary technical difficulties	Incidents that put the learner(s) or the tutor at risk, such as faulty electrical equipment
Coughing/sneezing fit, provided the learner recovers quickly and is fit to continue the assessment	General concerns about the quality of the controlled environment

Minor medical issues (such as needing to take medication) provided the learner recovers quickly and is fit to continue the assessment	Insufficient learner numbers impacting on the ability to continue with a task

All incidents must be thoroughly documented on the LAR and shared with the appropriate members of centre staff after the assessment concludes, such as the Internal Quality Assurer (IQA).

Assessment Decisions and Resits

Assessment Decisions

The tutor must evaluate each learner's individual performance, whether they are part of an assessed group or a group that includes participants not being assessed.

To achieve a pass, learners should generally demonstrate the level requirements in a way that is:

- consistent
- effective
- appropriate to the expected standard for that level.

Tutors should expect that learners demonstrate secure overall performance across the range of level requirements. Any shortfalls in meeting a Scope of Study Statement must be balanced by the demonstration of that same content area elsewhere in the assessment.

Assessment decisions should be objective and based only on the set criteria, ensuring all learners are assessed under identical conditions for consistency.

Although there is no mark scheme provided by VQA, tutors must standardise their interpretation and professional judgment prior to conducting the assessment to ensure consistent application across the SLC assessment component. For further information and guidance staff must refer to the *VQA Functional Skills at Entry Level Quality Assurance and Standardisation Guide.*

All assessment decisions must be documented in the *LAR.*

Providing Feedback

Assessment feedback must always be recorded on the LAR. Feedback should be constructive and motivate the learner to progress. The focus of feedback must cover:

- what the learner did well
- specific skills or knowledge gaps
- concrete examples from the assessment for clarity
- steps the learner can take to improve
- additional resources or help available
- what to focus on before the next assessment if a resit is required.

Assessment Resits

Learners who do not pass an assessment task due to an unmet scope of study requirements may resit the SLC assessment. While VQA does not set a mandatory interval between assessment attempts, learners should have sufficient support and time to work on development areas before resitting.

Each resit must involve a different SLC assessment task. If a learner passes one SLC task but not the other, they are only required to retake a new task covering the missed scope of study.

Centre staff are trusted to decide when a learner is ready for a resit, acknowledging that readiness may vary based on individual circumstances.

Internal Quality Assurance and Standardisation

Internal quality assurance and standardisation processes for the SLC assessment must commence in advance, be conducted at regular intervals throughout the VQA cycle (1 September – 31 August) and involve all staff members involved in the delivery of the Entry Level Functional Skills SLC assessments. For further guidance, please refer to the *VQA Functional Skills at Entry Level Quality Assurance and Standardisation Guide.*